



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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1988 DUCK FLIGHT FORECAST SECOND LOWEST ON RECORD

This fall's migrating duck population will be the second lowest on record, according to a status report issued July 25 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Canadian Wildlife Service. Biologists from the two agencies said long-term drought and associated habitat degradation have combined to reduce the anticipated fall flight to 66 million birds. This is down substantially from the 1987 index of 74 million birds and exceeds only the record low 1985 index of 62 million birds.

Discussing the report, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Frank Dunkle said, "This report merely confirms our concerns of recent months. The continued drought has dried up the prime waterfowl breeding areas in Canada and the north-central United States. Our surveys indicate many ducks simply overflowed the parched prairie wetlands and moved into northern Canada where the probability of young being produced is lower."

The outlook for fall flights of geese, however, is considered favorable, with their numbers about the same or slightly higher than last year. Weather conditions in the far north where the geese breed were more favorable than in the prairie regions where ducks nest.

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The fall flight forecast is based on spring breeding populations, habitat conditions, and production of young. The report was released during the annual status of waterfowl meeting held July 25 in Denver, Colorado. The meeting was attended by biologists from United States' and Canadian wildlife agencies, as well as consultants from the four waterfowl flyways. The meeting is considered the starting point for the annual process of setting fall waterfowl hunting regulations.

Addressing the group, Dunkle said, "The numbers reflected in this year's report are not good, and it is evident it will take at least several years of good weather to rehabilitate the wetlands so vital to breeding waterfowl. This means we must preserve core waterfowl breeding populations so they can respond when habitat conditions improve. To this end, I am recommending a short, simple season to significantly reduce the kill and protect waterfowl resources."

The individual flyway councils will provide recommendations to the Service's Waterfowl Regulations Committee. Those recommendations will be the subject of a public hearing to be held August 3, 1988, beginning at 9 a.m. in the Main Interior Building auditorium at 18th and C Streets NW., Washington, DC.

Following consideration of comments received during the public hearing, the proposed frameworks for the 1988-89 waterfowl hunting season will be published in the Federal Register and undergo another comment period. When the season framework dates are finalized by the Service in early September, the individual states select their actual hunting season dates and bag limits from within the frameworks. In setting their seasons, the states may be more restrictive, but not more liberal, than the established frameworks.

Addressing the outlook for this fall's hunting season, Dunkle said, "I am confident waterfowl hunters will support harvest reductions this year. Our present situation serves to underscore the importance of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and its goals to enhance and protect wetlands for future waterfowl populations."